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President Reagan's joke about bombing Russia

Further controversy was aroused over a flippant remark made by President Reagan on Aug. 11 during a preparatory voice check for his weekly radio broadcast to the nation, the remark later being made public. He said: 'My fellow Americans, I am pleased to tell you today I signed legislation which outlaws Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes.' The remark was strongly attacked in the Soviet Union, Tass (the Soviet news agency) claiming that it revealed the President's true attitude to the Soviet Union.

The Japanese newspaper *Yomiuri Shimbun*, quoting reliable sources in the Japanese Foreign Ministry, later reported that the Soviet Far East military headquarters at Vladivostok had on Aug. 15 signalled to a command station at Ussuriysk (50 miles north): 'We now begin military action against US forces.' The message was cancelled 30 minutes later, and it was speculated that it had been intended as retaliation for President Reagan's remark.

Controversial statements were made by President Reagan and Mr Shultz during August about the February 1945 Yalta agreement [see 699 A] and the postwar division of Europe.

Speaking on Aug. 17 at a White House luncheon commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Warsaw uprising against German occupying forces in Poland, President Reagan said that the USA 'rejects any interpretation of the Yalta agreement that suggests American consent for the division of Europe into spheres of influence', since 'passively accepting the permanent subjugation of the people of Eastern Europe is not an acceptable alternative'. Noting that the Yalta agreement had provided for 'free democratic elections' in all countries liberated from German occupation in the Second World War, he added: 'There is no reason to absolve the Soviet Union or ourselves from this commitment.' Tass replied by accusing President Reagan of distorting history and of challenging the postwar political shape of Europe.

Mr Shultz on Aug. 20 said that the USA 'will never accept the idea of a divided Europe', and he attacked 'imperial domination' by the Soviet Union. Mr George Bush, the Vice-President, had similarly stated in a speech in Vienna in 1983 that 'we recognize no lawful division of Europe', and on March 19, 1984, Mr Elliott Abrams, the Assistant Secretary for Human Rights at the State Department, was reported to have condemned the 1940 incorporation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union for security reasons as a mask for 'Soviet imperialism', adding that the USA would continue to protest against human rights violations in the Baltic republics. (For arrests of dissidents in the Baltic republics, [see page 33116 A])

The *Neue Zurcher Zeitung* on Aug. 21 quoted a report in the US periodical *Satellite Week* on a US government project which was investigating the possibility of constructing a satellite transmitter for broadcasts to Eastern Europe. The proposal was condemned on Nov. 28 by Mr Leonid Zamyatin, the head of the CPSU central committee's information department, who said that the USA was intending to carry out 'televised propagandist aggression' against other countries regardless of their wishes.

Five crewmen on a US supply ship were detained by a Soviet vessel in the Bering Strait on Sept. 12,

having allegedly entered Soviet territorial waters. They were released on Sept. 19.

During the late summer and early autumn, Soviet official statements suggested that the Soviet leadership saw little possibility of real dialogue with the USA if, as seemed increasingly probable, President Reagan was re-elected. However, Mr Gromyko met several US leaders during a visit to the USA in late September, following the opening on Sept. 18 of the UN General Assembly, which he was to address.

President Reagan's address to the General Assembly preceded that of Mr Gromyko. In a generally conciliatory speech, delivered on Sept. 24, he proposed 'constructive negotiations', regular meetings at Cabinet level, and arms control talks between the USA and the Soviet Union. Mr Gromyko's speech on Sept. 27, by contrast, was a concerted attack on US foreign policy. He criticized the US administration for failing to 'modify the substance of its policies' on arms control, and dismissed President Reagan's overture as a propaganda ploy 'intended to secure a unilateral advantage for the USA'. However, he added that 'the Soviet Union wants peace and only peace with the USA'. (In a speech on the same day, President Chernenko blamed 'the growing aggressiveness of imperialism' for 'the dangerous situation that has emerged in the world'; he reiterated the Soviet Union's willingness to act 'as an honest partner' in dealings with the capitalist world, but placed on the West the onus for reducing tension.)

Mr Gromyko met Mr Shultz in New York on Sept. 26 for discussions on arms control and security, regional problems, human rights issues and other questions. Mr Shultz described the exchange as 'a comprehensive and broad conversation'. While in New York, Mr Gromyko also met Mr Walter Mondale, the Democratic Party candidate in the presidential election.

President Reagan's meeting with Mr Gromyko in Washington on Sept. 28 was his first full meeting with a member of the Soviet leadership since his inauguration in January 1981. Mr Shultz, who was also present, said that Mr Gromyko had 'expressed his views powerfully and aggressively', but he added that the meeting had afforded 'a useful and intensive exchange of views' on arms control, human rights, regional problems in the Middle East, and the situation in Central America and South-East Asia. No immediate results were expected from the meeting by either side, although Mr Robert MacFarlane, the National security Adviser (who also attended the meeting), suggested that arms control talks could resume within a few months.

Mr Gromyko and Mr Shultz held a further meeting at the State Department in Washington on Sept. 30. It was later reported that they had agreed on a process for regular exchanges of views at a high level, which would go beyond normal contacts at ambassadorial level.

In the following weeks, the Soviet leadership on a number of occasions called on the USA to prove its sincerity about wishing to improve relations with the Soviet Union by taking concrete action, but indicated a readiness for negotiations. President Chernenko, in an apparent gesture towards US opinion, granted a personal interview to the *Washington Post* (published on Oct. in which he criticized the USA for obstructing arms control and for rejecting Soviet initiatives, but also called for talks.

Mr Shultz on Oct. 18-19 delivered two major speeches on relations with the Soviet Union. He said that the US administration was prepared for negotiations with the Soviet Union on all issues, including arms control, as soon as the Soviet leaders accepted the fact of the reassertion of the USA's strength during President Reagan's first term. He indicated a shift in US tactics in dealings with the Soviet Union, stating that linkage (i. e. insisting that progress in negotiations on one problem should

be dependent on Soviet conduct in other areas) might not feature so prominently in the foreign policy of a second Reagan administration.

'There will be times when we must make progress on one dimension of the relationship contingent on progress in others', Mr Shultz said, but he continued: 'At the same time, linkage as an instrument of policy has limitations; if applied rigidly, it could yield the initiative to the Soviets, letting them set the pace and the character of the relationship. We do not seek negotiations for their own sake; we negotiate when it is in our interest to do so. Therefore, when the Soviet Union acts in a way we find objectionable, it may not always make sense for us to break off negotiations or suspend agreements.'

A meeting took place on Nov. 4 in New Delhi (India) between Mr Shultz and Mr Nikolai Tikhonov, the Soviet Prime Minister, both of whom were attending the funeral of Mrs Indira Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister, who had been assassinated on Oct. 31 [see 33220 A]. 'A number of topics' were discussed at what Mr Shultz termed 'a good meeting'. Mr Tikhonov reassured Mr Shultz that the Soviet government did not believe that the US Central Intelligence Agency was linked with Mrs Gandhi's assassination, as certain Soviet press reports had suggested.

Following President Reagan's election victory on Nov. 6, Mr Shultz said that 'now is the time to push the negotiating and talking' on arms control problems. President Reagan's re-election led to an exchange of conciliatory messages between Presidents Chernenko and Reagan, both indicating a wish for improved relations.

It was announced simultaneously in Washington and Moscow on Nov. 22 that Mr Gromyko and Mr Shultz would meet in Geneva on Jan. 7–8, 1985, to discuss the resumption of Soviet-US talks on the whole range of arms control problems, including space weapons.

At a meeting in Moscow on Dec. 4 with Dr Armand Hammer, the chairman of the US Occidental Petroleum company (who since the 1917 revolution had met every Soviet leader except for Mr Andropov), President Chernenko confirmed that the initiative for the January meeting had come from the Soviet Union. He also indicated that he would agree to an early summit with President Reagan if the USA accepted a Soviet plan for a treaty banning the first use of nuclear weapons and if the January meeting was a success.

In the UK the government of Mrs Margaret Thatcher maintained an attitude towards the Soviet Union which marked out the UK as one of the USA's closest allies.

Addressing a conference of Young Conservatives in Bournemouth on Feb. 12, 1983, Mrs Thatcher said that deployment of US INF missiles in the UK was necessary because the Soviet Union presented the greatest threat to the UK since Munich (i. e. since the Nazi threat in the 1930s).

An attempt to resume direct governmental contact was made on April 24–27, when Mr Malcolm Rifkind, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, made the first visit to Moscow by a Foreign Office minister since that by Dr David Owen in October 1977 [see 28696]. He met Mr Georgy Kornienko, the Soviet First Deputy Foreign Minister, with whom he discussed the prospective INF deployment (Mr Rifkind rejecting the Soviet proposal for the inclusion of the British and French nuclear strike forces in the INF talks at Geneva) and regional problems. Mr Rifkind also appealed for the release of the imprisoned dissident Mr Anatoly Shcharansky, whose case had aroused much concern in the West [see 33351].

The British government condemned the Soviet shooting-down of the South Korea airliner on Aug. 31—Sept. 1 [see above] . A planned visit to the UK by Mr Kornienko was postponed, and Mr Viktor Popov, the Soviet ambassador in London, was told that his presence at the Conservative Party conference in Blackpool in October would be ‘inappropriate’.

Despite this incident and the arrival of the first US cruise missiles in the UK on Nov. 14, the UK government began to reveal a more pragmatic posture from the end of 1983 and the beginning of 1984, reportedly as a result of a thorough Foreign Office reassessment of the UK's relations with the Soviet Union which emphasized the cultivation of personal contacts with Soviet leaders.

Mrs Thatcher attended the funeral of President Andropov on Feb. 14, 1984, when she also met his successor, Mr Chernenko, and Mr Gromyko [see page 32865].

Mr Kornienko visited the UK on March 27–29, meeting Sir Geoffrey Howe, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and Mr Rifkind for discussions on arms control issues, regional problems and bilateral matters. He rejected British exhortations for a Soviet return to the INF talks.

Mr Paul Channon, the Minister for Trade, led a UK delegation to Moscow for talks on May 21–23 with Mr Nikolai Patolichev, the Soviet Minister of Foreign Trade, and other officials, on the expansion of Soviet-British trade (which will be described fully in a forthcoming article).

The new approach to the UK's relations with the Soviet Union was outlined by Mr Michael Heseltine, the Secretary of State for Defence, in a speech to the (Conservative) Bow Group on June 27. Outlining the historical roots of Soviet government policy, he urged understanding of Soviet history and thinking, and proposed a relationship built on dialogue and acceptance of the Soviet Union's role as a superpower, while maintaining the defences of the West at a strong enough level to ‘prevent giving the Soviets any risk-free opportunities’.

(The speech had first been delivered privately to the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London in May, but the text had not at that stage been made public because the Foreign and Commonwealth Office saw this as inappropriate in the light of the Soviet decision, announced on May 8— 33194 A) to boycott the Los Angeles Olympics.)

A visit to Moscow by Sir Geoffrey Howe on July 1–3 was dominated by the somewhat confused exchanges between the USA and the Soviet Union over the possibility of starting negotiations on space weapons [see page 33131-32]. During discussions with Sir Geoffrey, Mr Gromyko asserted that the USA was making the resumption of INF and strategic arms limitation talks a precondition for the opening of talks on space weapons; Sir Geoffrey, however, transmitted US assurances that this was not the case, but failed to convince the Soviet side.

Mr Gromyko's public remarks during the visit were extremely critical of US actions in connexion with arms control talks, and the Soviet side appeared to deprecate the closeness of the UK's links with the USA. Sir Geoffrey in addition raised human rights matters (in private), the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, and the jamming of BBC broadcasts by the Soviet Union (which was causing some irritation in the BBC and in British government circles). He also met President Chernenko.

Mrs Thatcher, in a speech to the European Atlantic group on July 11, strongly criticized Soviet internal and foreign policies. She implied that the Soviet leaders were ‘men who manipulate the language of freedom and democracy in order to destroy both’, but added that ‘even if Soviet attitudes

at present are more than usually unforthcoming, it is essential to keep open the lines of communication'.

While politicians and the media in the UK continued to be highly critical during this period of various aspects of Soviet foreign policy and of the treatment of Soviet dissidents, the Soviet media continued to attack British policy in Northern Ireland and official handling of the coal-miners' strike in the UK during 1984. Mr Aleksandr Belousov, the secretary of the Soviet coal-miners' union, stated on Oct. 29 that the Soviet Union 'on the initiative of Soviet trade unions' would henceforth suspend supplies of fuel to the UK for the duration of the strike. Following complaints from the UK about this statement, the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Trade on Nov. 3 declared that it would honour all existing contracts with the UK [see 33228 A]. [For the miners' strike] However, workers at a number of Soviet coal-mines sent donations to the British striking miners.

Announcement of impending Gromyko visit to UK - Mr Kinnock's visit to Moscow Mr Gorbachev's December 1984 visit to UK

Towards the end of 1984 there were signs of an improvement in Soviet-British relations, with a series of visits by leading figures being announced. There were reports of an emerging diplomatic scheme for West European relations with the Soviet Union during 1985, which was to include the UK, France, West Germany and perhaps Italy, and was to be based on the development of personal contacts between leaders. To this end it was announced on Oct. 11 that Mr Gromyko would visit the UK in 1985 (probably in the spring — see also above).

The Labour Party leader, Mr Neil Kinnock, led a party delegation which visited Moscow on Nov. 21–27.

During the visit Mr Kinnock met President Chernenko, who said that if a future Labour government implemented its present nuclear disarmament commitments (as reaffirmed at its annual conference, on Oct. 3, 1984), the number of missiles dismantled or removed by the UK would be matched by an equal Soviet reduction in medium-range nuclear missiles stationed in the European part of the Soviet Union. Complete nuclear disarmament by the UK would create the conditions under which the Soviet Union would guarantee not to target its nuclear weapons on British territory.

Mr Mikhail Gorbachev, a member of the CPSU politburo and secretariat, headed a delegation from the Supreme Soviet which visited the UK on Dec. 15–21 at the invitation of the British branch of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Mr Gorbachev was the most senior Soviet leader to visit the UK since 1967, when Mr Alexei Kosygin, then the Soviet Premier, had paid an official visit [see page 21880]. Mr Gorbachev on Dec. 16 had talks with Mrs Thatcher and Sir Geoffrey Howe, and further talks with Sir Geoffrey the next day, discussing arms control issues, regional problems, bilateral relations and human rights (briefly). Mr Gorbachev delivered to Mrs Thatcher a personal message from President Chernenko which emphasized the importance of 'the establishment of a certain mutual understanding' between the Soviet Union and the UK. Mr Gorbachev later said that his meeting with Mrs Thatcher had been 'businesslike', 'constructive' and 'frank'; the Prime Minister described Mr Gorbachev as someone with whom the UK could 'do business'.

Addressing the House of Commons foreign affairs committee on Dec. 18, Mr Gorbachev recalled the advantages of détente, and added: 'We should like a broad dialogue and the development of...

co-operation in solving acute political problems, in the economy, in science and technology, and in the development of cultural links and exchanges.' Regarding arms control and other talks, he said that the Soviet Union was 'prepared to go as far as the Western partners... will come to meet us', and continued: 'In politics and diplomacy there is always room for reasonable compromises.' He added that the Soviet Union needed peace in order to pursue its 'huge development programmes', a 'steady course' which would not be changed.

Mr Gorbachev answered questions from members of the committee, and when asked about the alleged repression of unofficial religious activists in the Soviet Union he retorted: 'I can quote a few facts about human rights in the UK; for example, you persecute entire communities, nationalities. You have 2,300,000 unemployed [an underestimate]. You govern your society and leave us to govern ours.'

During the visit Mr Gorbachev held talks with representatives of the John Brown Engineering Company (which had supplied turbines for the Urengoi gas pipeline— see page 31723] on a contract for the construction of a plastics plant in the Soviet Union, and also visited the Austin-Rover motor works at Cowley and the ICI agricultural research centre at Bracknell. Addressing the London Chamber of Commerce on Dec. 20, he said that Soviet-British trade could rise by 40 to 50 per cent in the next few years. On the same day he met Mr Channon for trade talks.

Mr Gorbachev also met Mr Kinnock and Mr Denis Healey (the Labour Party spokesman for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs), Mr David Steel (the Liberal Party leader) and Dr David Owen (the leader of the Social Democratic Party).

Mr Gorbachev returned to Moscow on Dec. 21 from Scotland, where the visit ended one day earlier than planned, due to the death on Dec. 20 of Marshal Dmitry Ustinov, the Soviet Minister of Defence (which will be detailed in a future article).

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